

Senior Honors Recital

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

My senior honors recital included the Concerto in B-flat Major for Harp by George Frideric Handel, *Haru no Umi* by Michio Miyagi, *Introduction et Allegro* by Maurice Ravel, "Spanish Dance No. 1" from *La Vida Breve* by Manuel de Falla, and *Scintillation* by Carlos Salzedo. This program demonstrated the evolution of harp music, as well as the pedal harp's evolution as an instrument. Beginning in the 18th century and moving to the 20th century, the music performed showed the harp's transition from Handel's Baroque style to the extended techniques employed by Salzedo. At the recital, I provided audience members with program notes giving background and contextual information about each piece on the program.

Acknowledgements

- I'd like to thank my wonderful harp teacher, Ms. Elizabeth Richter, who has guided me during my time at Ball State and has provided abundant encouragement, advice, and expertise.
- I'm indebted to the Ball State academic faculty for sharing their knowledge with me through their classes, which greatly broadened my interests and challenged me in ways I had never imagined possible.
- Thank you to those who collaborated with me to make beautiful music for my senior recital: Susy Smit, Annie King, and Tim Lewis.
- An enormous thank you to the Ball State School of Music and the Honors College for the generous financial support, without which I'm not sure I could have attended BSU. I'm forever grateful.

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Please see the supplemental CD, which contains audio recording of the recital

Process Analysis Statement

Performing a senior recital is always a daunting task. Performance majors are required to give a junior and senior recital to showcase their hard work and growth as a musician. I was fortunate enough to give a sophomore recital in addition to the junior recital I did last year, but the idea of performing another recital during my senior year did not seem any easier because of the additional performing experience. Putting together a recital is a challenging and intimidating process, regardless of your experience level or technical ability. The preparation for every recital is full of challenges and some self-doubt, but recitals also give you a sense of accomplishment and pride. Performers work extremely hard and put in countless hours of practicing, score study, and mental preparation. After all of that work, the best reward is feeling the flood of relief and joy after playing the last note of the recital.

The process of performing a senior recital begins many months before the actual recital day. For me, the long journey to my senior recital began at the lesson following my junior recital. In this lesson, back in April 2016, my harp professor, Ms. Richter, and I began choosing the repertoire for my senior recital. The repertoire should demonstrate your technical abilities, as well as your musicality and musicianship, so it was important to choose a variety of pieces that allowed me to show musical depth. We tentatively decided that I would play G.F. Handel's Concerto in B-Flat Major, Op. 4, No. 6, Maurice Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro*, Carlos Salzedo's *Scintillation*, and Vincent Persichetti's Serenade No. 10 For Flute and Harp.

All of these pieces are standards in the harp repertoire, so they are important pieces to learn. Further, each of them has something in particular that is challenging and provides a good opportunity to learn something new. The Handel Concerto is comprised of three movements. The first movement has several passages that have tricky fingerings that require a good technical base

and finger dexterity. The second movement requires both musical tenderness and power at the same time. The third movement is performed at a faster tempo and requires the use of many technical abilities like finger slides and other fingerings that can easily tangle your fingers. Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro* is scored for harp, string quartet, flute, and clarinet, but is frequently performed with harp and piano, as I intended to perform it. The piece is challenging through its technical demands, such as the quick footwork required for changing many pedals quickly, as well as in the demand for musical artistry and shaping of the phrases. Salzedo's *Scintillation* is an especially challenging work in several regards. Its almost atonal character makes it difficult to memorize, and every section of the piece has a different technical challenge. For example, the section of rhythmic glissandos has many fast pedal changes, and there is a section of very fast notes in which your hands are playing right on top of each other, and you must make the melody notes stand out from the "background" notes.

The program was not set in stone, however, and was changed a few times. Over the summer, I attended the Rocky Mountain Springs Harp Program in Steamboat Springs, CO, and the harp instructors, Grace Bauson and Rachel Browne (both Ball State alumni), performed an arrangement of "Spanish Dance No. 1" from Manuel de Falla's *La Vida Breve*. I fell in love with the vitality of the piece, and I promptly requested that I perform it on my senior recital with the graduate harp assistant, Annie King. This was the first addition to my senior recital program, and after an exquisite guest performance by Alice Giles, a celebrated Australian harpist, I decided to add another piece: Salzedo's *Ballade*. This, I must admit, was an ambitious and unrealistic piece to undertake, especially near the end of the fall semester. I had always admired *Ballade*, and after hearing Giles play it at her recital, I could not wait to get my fingers on it. I promised myself that I would practice it obsessively over winter break, but although I did my best, I ultimately decided

that it was not realistic to perform it on my senior recital. In my quest to conquer *Ballade*, I had also switched out Persichetti's Serenade No. 10 for a shorter and less complex piece, *Haru no Umi* by Michio Miyagi. *Haru no Umi* was a good substitute for Serenade No. 10 because both are for flute and harp, so I knew I would still be getting wonderful ensemble experience.

While I was in the process of finalizing my recital program, I was already working on the pieces. Each piece on my program required a unique mind set, different technical abilities, and a specific way of practicing and learning the music. The first piece on my program, Handel's Concerto in B-Flat Major, was difficult in an understated way. The texture is much thinner in comparison to pieces like Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro*, and because of this, mistakes and stumbles are much more noticeable. I spent a lot of time working on each hand separately in order to completely know what I was playing. I memorized each hand separately and practiced in many different ways (e.g., playing the left hand, while singing the right hand) to ensure that both my muscles and my brain knew the music inside and out. Another challenge I encountered was that I had learned the first movement in high school. The problem was that I had learned the edition edited by Carlos Salzedo, and for my senior recital, I was learning Lucile Lawrence's edition. These editions are slightly different, and that made it more difficult for me because I was used to playing and hearing something else. I had to, in essence, re-teach my ear and muscles, which is never an easy task.

Haru no Umi provided a unique experience because the piece was originally written for traditional Japanese instruments, the koto and shakuhachi. The harp and flute are good choices for a Western arrangement of the traditional piece because the koto is a plucked string instrument and the shakuhachi is a flute-like instrument. The challenge was trying to balance the sounds of the western instruments and imitation of the Japanese instruments. The flute professor, Dr.

Watanabe, is from Japan and was helpful in coaching Susy and me in our preparations. She was able to help us imitate the traditional instruments in order to evoke a similar sound and feeling as the original pairing. My playing could imitate the koto by accenting the rhythmic syncopation and playing with a stronger sound. My harp professor, Ms. Richter, was helpful in reigning in our new-found Japanese-like sound. We had to keep in mind that, although it can be helpful to imitate the piece's original instruments, we were still playing Western instruments.

Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro* was difficult in many ways. First, there are several technically challenging passages, such as the last section in which the fingering is especially complicated and is played at a fast tempo. Further, I found memorizing all of the pedals to be especially difficult. I had to work on memorizing the pedals for a long time and try memorizing them in different ways. For example, I used my visual memory to memorize how the pedal diagram looked, and I also tried singing the pedal names as well. Ultimately, the combination of memorization techniques worked in my favor because I always knew I would be able to find my way out of any trouble if I missed a pedal or moved the wrong one during a performance. The final piece of getting this work ready for my recital was working with Tim, the pianist who would be playing with me. We began rehearsing for an hour together every week after spring break. Tim also came to my lessons a few weeks so that Ms. Richter could listen and coach us. Through this type of practice, we were able to refine the tempos, dynamics, phrasing, and other musical elements in order to perform the piece successfully.

"Spanish Dance No. 1" was so much fun to put together. Annie and I rehearsed weekly beginning in the fall, and we began rehearsing the piece early enough that we could really take our time in the preparation. We began practicing it very slowly so that we could match up our rhythms and coordinate our dynamics and the use of *rubato*. Gradually, we built up our speed

until we were at our final performance tempo. We were able to perform the piece several times before my recital, and because of the previous performances, we both felt completely prepared going into my senior recital. We were comfortable with each other, and our communication was good enough so that we could keep going no matter what happened.

The final piece on my recital program was my favorite and the most mentally and physically taxing. I chose this piece because I had wanted to play it ever since I first began the harp at age 7. The interesting rhythms and exciting glissando section are so much fun to listen to, and I had made it my goal to play it before I was done with my undergraduate degree. Although I loved the piece, it is an extremely difficult piece that you must perform many times before feeling comfortable with it. I knew this going into it, so I worked really hard to learn it quickly. I wanted to get it memorized as soon as possible so that I would have ample time to settle into it. My goal was to have the entire piece memorized for the harp master class with Alice Giles on October 20, 2016. Although it was not solidly memorized, I had achieved my goal and was able to play *Scintillation* for Alice Giles when she visited Ball State. After that first, very nerve-racking performance, I continued working on solidifying my memory of the piece. I also worked a lot on making the piece my own through effective dynamics and musicality. This aspect took the longest to solidify because when learning a new piece, you are constantly shaping your view of it. Only after months and months of working on *Scintillation* was I finally able to perform it with intensity, rhythmic accuracy, and musical flare.

All of this hard work and practice led up to the dress rehearsal and the recital. Dress rehearsals are essential to a good performance as it gives you time in the performance space. I performed in Ball State's Choral Hall, which is a wonderful small performance hall. The harp's sound fills the space, and my favorite part about playing in Choral Hall is that you are able to

play extremely softly, but the sound is still clear and perfectly audible to the audience. At my dress rehearsal, just a few days before my senior recital, I was able to run through each piece on my program for Ms. Richter and Annie King. They gave me great feedback about my sound and performance etiquette. Because the music sounds so different to the performer and the audience, this step is crucial to an effective performance. For example, at the start of the cadenza in the *Introduction et Allegro*, I was playing too fast and the low bass notes were blurring together in the hall. I was able to correct this by starting slower and building up my speed more gradually.

On the day of my senior recital, I tried to keep a positive mindset. Although I was nervous about the performance that evening, I knew that I was prepared. Everyone who would be at my recital cared about me and wanted to see me succeed. I kept reminding myself that no one was judging me more than myself and that all I had to do was have a good time on stage. Performing is all about sharing your emotions and telling a story, so I tried to focus on what I wanted to say with my music, rather than putting all of my energy into worrying that I would mess up.

I chose to begin my recital with the Handel Concerto because the first and third movements are upbeat and energetic—a great way to start a recital. The first movement had always been the toughest one for me, so it was a daunting way to begin. Although I knew the music well, my nerves got to me, and the first movement was not as clean as I was capable of playing. I recovered well with the second movement, and I was able to move my focus off of the notes I had missed in the first movement to what I wanted to say with the second and the third movements. The next piece on the program was *Haru no Umi*, and I chose to put this flute and harp duet second for logistical reasons. I knew I wanted to end the first half of the program with *Introduction and Allegro*, so I knew that the piano would have to be onstage for the first half of

the recital. Because of the piano, there would not have been enough room for two harps onstage. *Haru no Umi* went really well, and Susy and I created a wonderful, sea-like atmosphere. *Introduction et Allegro*, however, did not go as well as I had hoped it would. I was rather distracted while playing, even missing an entrance at one point, and could not get my head into the music. There were many beautiful moments, but I was disappointed in how I played it overall. The first piece after intermission was the harp duet, "Spanish Dance No. 1." This was a wonderful piece to begin the second half with because its energy is very lively. Annie and I had a lot of fun performing it, and we were able to enjoy making music together, rather than worrying about what we were playing. Finally, the showstopper finale was *Scintillation*. Besides its powerful ending, I wanted to finish my recital with this piece because it is extremely hard on your fingers due to the many glissandos and the *fortissimo* dynamics. Overall, I was extremely pleased with how I played *Scintillation*. I was able to recover quickly and smoothly from the minor mistakes I made, and although the final section of the piece did not go as smoothly as it could have, I was still able to enjoy playing a piece that I had looked forward to since third grade.

Besides learning a lot of music, putting together a recital is a much larger learning process. Throughout my time preparing for this recital, I learned how to be patient with myself when I could not memorize *Introduction et Allegro* as quickly as I thought I should be able to. When I decided to learn *Ballade*, I learned that it is okay to set a goal and not meet it. I learned perseverance with *Scintillation* by memorizing the piece early and then sitting with it for months while the notes and musicality solidified. Finally, I learned a little more about how to forgive myself and was afforded a chance to reflect on how far I have come as a musician and as a person. Four years ago, I had the self-confidence of a pea and would become frustrated to the

point of tears if I made a single mistake. Through all my performances at Ball State, culminating in my senior recital, I have grown into a somewhat confident—but *much* more confident than four years ago—musician who realizes that mistakes are a part of life and music. My senior recital did not go how I wanted it to go, but I kept my cool while playing, there were no tears on stage, and I was able to bow with a smile after each piece, regardless of how I felt it had gone in the moment.

Recital Program



School of Music

Senior Recital

Saturday, April 22, 2017
Choral Hall, 5:30 p.m.

KIERSTEN ALCORN, harp

G. F. Handel **Concerto in B-flat Major, Op. 4, No. 6**
(1685-1759) I. Andante allegro
 II. Larghetto
 III. Allegro moderato

Michio Miyagi **Haru no Umi**
(1894-1956)
arr. Josef Molnar

Susy Smit, flute

Maurice Ravel **Introduction et Allegro**
(1875-1937)

Tim Lewis, piano

---INTERMISSION---

Manuel de Falla **Spanish Dance No. 1 from *La Vida Breve***
(1876-1946)
arr. Patricia Masri Fletcher

Joanne King, harp

Carlos Salzedo
(1885-1961)

Scintillation

Kiersten Alcorn is a student of Elizabeth Richter.
This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Bachelor of Music in music performance.

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School of Music  
UPCOMING EVENTS

**Senior Recital: Kelsey Sandefur, soprano**

Saturday, April 22 | 7:30 p.m. | Sursa Hall

**Chamber Choir & Concert Choir**

Sunday, April 23 | 3 p.m. | Sursa Hall

**DA Lecture Recital: Hilary Janysek, flute**

Sunday, April 23 | 5:30 p.m. | Choral Hall

**Faculty Artist Series: Nathan Bogert, saxophone, & James Helton, piano**

Sunday, April 23 | 7:30 p.m. | Sursa Hall

**General Music Recital Hour: Honors Convocation**

Monday, April 24 | 1 p.m. | Sursa Hall

**MTNA Student Recital**

Monday, April 24 | 5:30 p.m. | Choral Hall

**EMI Four - Concert to Honor Cleve Scott**

Monday, April 24 | 7:30 p.m. | Sursa Hall

**Percussion Ensembles II & III**

Monday, April 24 | 7:30 p.m. | Pruis Hall

**Guitar Festival XXIX****Faculty Artist Series: Paul Reilly, guitar**

Tuesday, April 25 | 5:30 p.m. | Choral Hall

**Ball State Symphony Orchestra**

Tuesday, April 25 | 7:30 p.m. | Sursa Hall

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## Program Notes

### George Frideric Handel, Concerto in B-flat Major for Harp

Handel—one of the most celebrated composers of the Baroque era—was best known for his operas and oratorios. Perhaps above all, he sought financial success in his musical endeavors, hence, for example, his switch from writing operas to writing oratorios. With not much money to be made in harp concertos—as well as a scarcity of harpists—he wrote only one, which he soon rewrote as an organ concerto so the work would receive more performances. The Concerto in B-flat Major was originally composed in 1736 for the harp, but it was first performed in an instrumentation of “harp, lute, lyrichord, and, other instruments” as part of Handel’s *Alexander’s Feast* (played after the recitative “Timotheus, plac’d on high” in Part I). The concerto has since become a staple in the harp repertoire. Although the concerto was written for harp and orchestra, and is frequently performed that way, it has also become common for the concerto to be performed as a solo as well. The composition is compositionally conservative, following the standard 3-movement, fast-slow-fast concerto pattern and utilizing the expected formal structures for each movement.<sup>1</sup>

### Michio Miyagi, *Haru no Umi*

Miyagi began his musical career playing koto—a traditional Japanese zither-type instrument with thirteen strings, each with a movable bridge. Despite becoming completely blind at age eight, he achieved the highest rank possible as a koto player (*dai-kengyō*). As a composer, he was recognized as an authority in the New Japanese Music movement, and composed his most famous work entitled *Haru no Umi* (“The Sea in Spring”) in 1929, drawing inspiration from his childhood memories of the sea of Tomonoura before he lost his eyesight.<sup>2</sup> Originally composed for koto and shakuhachi (an end-blown flute), Josef Molnar arranged the piece for harp and flute—a fitting westernization of the piece’s original instrumentation. Molnar is an Austrian harpist who lives and teaches in Japan.<sup>3</sup>

### Maurice Ravel, *Introduction et Allegro*

Ravel wrote *Introduction et Allegro* in 1905 for harp, flute, clarinet, and string quartet. The work was commissioned by the Érard company, who wished to display the impressive capabilities of their double-action pedal harp. This can be seen as the direct response of a competitor to Debussy’s *Danse sacrée et danse profane*, which the Pleyel company had commissioned in 1904 to show off their new chromatic harp. Ultimately, the Érard company’s double-action pedal harp won out with a far superior technical design, leaving the Pleyel company’s cross-strung chromatic harp in the dust. Unsurprisingly, given the purpose of its commission, the piece calls for a multitude of pedal changes—every pedal position possible is utilized over the course of the work—to exhibit Érard’s engineering feat. The *Introduction et Allegro* reflects Ravel’s post-

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Hicks, “Handel, George Frideric,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Johnson, “Miyagi Michio,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Griffiths, “Molnar, Josef,” *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.



Impressionist style, although he breaks from the mold when he combines two themes contrapuntally. Although Ravel omitted it from the catalogue of his works and failed to mention it in his autobiography, *Introduction et Allegro* was frequently performed at his concerts, and he even wrote a version for two pianos in 1906. It has remained one of the most popular works in the harp repertoire.<sup>4</sup>

Manuel de Falla, "Spanish Dance No. 1" from *La Vida Breve*

*La Vida Breve*, a short two-act opera, features nearly as much instrumental music as vocal music. During a party celebrating the marriage of Paco and Carmela, the orchestra plays "Spanish Dance No. 1" to accompany a *jota* (a traditional Spanish dance, most likely originating from Aragon) that is being danced on stage. Although originally written for full orchestra, the piece has since been transcribed numerous times, including versions for violin and piano, flute and harp, solo harp, and as will be performed tonight, two harps.<sup>5</sup> Although this opera focuses on Spanish culture, Falla was often criticized as a Francophile, and his devotion to Debussy was a frequent point of attack for Spaniards. Ironically, then, the two Spanish dances from *La Vida Breve* have taken up a role of great nationalist association and pride and are performed frequently even though the opera itself is rarely performed today.<sup>6</sup>

Carlos Salzedo, *Scintillation*

Although Salzedo's musical career spanned the harp, the piano, composition, and conducting, he is best known as an innovator of harp technique. His playing method focused on tension-relief through bodily position as well as on employment of expressive gestures. Additionally, Salzedo invented many new extended techniques for the harp, some of which are present in *Scintillation*. These new techniques effectively brought the harp into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and added numerous unique colors and sounds to the harp's repertoire. With *Scintillation*, Salzedo was influenced by the Spanish colors and rhythms he encountered during a trip to Mexico, and he captured some of these colors through use of extended techniques such as brassy sounds (produced by playing near the sound board with fingernails), gushing chords (rhythmic glissandos), and aeolian chords (quick glissandos of chord clusters).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara L. Kelly, "Ravel, Maurice," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Crichton, "Vida breve, La," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Carol A. Hess, "Falla, Manuel de," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> Shelley Wiest, "Salzedo, Carlos," *Grove Music Online*, accessed January 4, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.



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